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Goodbye to All That: A Memoir of Friendship as Its Breaking Point (the Friendship of Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon)

"It was my bitter leave-taking of England"[1]

Robert Graves published his war memoir *Goodbye to All That* in 1929, on the wave of the confessional boom of the inter-war period, calling it "a formal good-bye to you and to you and to you and to all that […]" (Graves 1931: 13). It was preceded by the memoirs of his friends: Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* and Siegfried Sassoon's semi-autobiographical work *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, both published in 1928. As Graves himself admits in the prologue to the revised version of the book, published in 1957, *Goodbye to All That* was a commercial endeavour that could have ended in legal prosecution. He dictated it in haste, intending it to cater to the sensationalist tastes of the public who "wanted to read about: famous friends, hauntings, murders and royalty" (Seymour 1996: 180, 183). To Graves's relief, the book turned out to be a commercial success, enabling him to leave the past behind and move to Majorca.

His freedom cost him dearly, however; *Goodbye to All That* is a candid portrayal not only of Graves himself but also of his family, friends and institutions to which he used to belong, which in some cases caused serious offence. The book opens with Graves's recollections of his Victorian parents and his strict upbringing. Then he recounts his traumatic experiences at Charterhouse School, known for its disregard of learning, sexual exploits between pupils and constant bullying. Subsequently, Graves offers an extensive account of his friendship with Sassoon during

[1] Graves 2011.

the Great War, disclosing confidential information and thus betraying Sassoon's trust. Graves's memoir was the last straw for their deteriorating friendship.

Goodbye to All That was the first narrative chronicling their war-time friendship. Graves is conspicuously absent from Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, the last chapters of which concern the war, but he appears in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, Sassoon's 1930 novel.

Two Fusiliers

The two men met in France in 1915 as officers in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, when Graves was twenty and Sassoon twenty-nine. From the start, their friendship was deeply rooted in literature – they were both poets and avid readers of poetry, which created a bond between them. Their accidental meeting shaped the creation and reception of British war poetry through their mutual encouragement and critique, their admiration of Charles Hamilton Sorley and influence on Wilfred Owen. In *Goodbye to All That*, Graves recounts how his attention was drawn to the first quality book he had seen in France so far, apart from his own Keats and Blake. It was *The Essays of Lionel Johnson*, inscribed with the peculiar name "Siegfried Sassoon." As a sociable outsider, Graves decided to get to know his fellow book enthusiast.

Graves's account of their first conversations casts a new light on the figure of Sassoon, now recognised as a satirical poet and a voice of the suffering soldiers. Graves reminisces about the initial clash between their views on war poetry. Sassoon, still idealistic and driven by his martyr complex, was critical of the realism of Graves's poetry. Graves, although considerably younger than Sassoon, was a more experienced soldier. Several weeks prior to the meeting with Sassoon his faith in the war was shattered when his battalion was sacrificed in a diversionary advance that was to haunt him for years to come (Seymour 1996: 47). At the end of 1915, having read Sassoon's idealistic verses, Graves pronounced his verdict: "he would soon change his style" (Graves 2011: 182). On 2 December Sassoon noted in his diary: "Robert Graves lent me his manuscript poems to read: some very bad, violent and repulsive. A few full of promise and real beauty. He oughtn't to publish yet" (Sassoon 1983: 21).

Their friendship came about at the right moment. They were both making their first steps in the literary world under the wing of Edward Marsh, to whom Sassoon had been introduced by Edmund Gosse and whom Graves

met through George Mallory. Sassoon had already published the satire *The Daffodil Murderer* and a few private volumes; Graves was preparing his first volume, *Over the Brazier*, for publication. Literature was not the only thing they had in common: both had felt isolated at school and had had few genuine friends; what is more, they both thought of themselves as homosexuals – a label later further embraced by Sassoon and rejected by Graves. However, the bond that would prove crucial for their friendship and their poetry was their shared war experience.

In December 1915 the two poets were sent to divisional training with David "Tommy" Thomas, with whom Sassoon had been to officer training the previous spring. During the training, they were inseparable; outwardly they were three officer friends but inwardly they were two poets and their muse. Graves and Sassoon were both charmed by Thomas's good--naturedness and gentleness. When Tommy was killed in March 1916, it was a blow to them. Graves states that Thomas's death affected him more than any other, making him feel empty and lost. However, he goes on to say that it was Sassoon who experienced Tommy's death more profoundly; it hurt and angered him to such an extent that he went on daring escapades to kill Germans, earning his nickname "Mad Jack." Graves's biographer remarks that "David Thomas's death bound Sassoon and Graves together as his closest friends" and that they sought comfort and diversion in their stimulating conversations about literature and exchanging manuscripts, pretending they were recipes for rum punch (Seymour 1996: 49).

Their grief found expression in their poems. In "Goliath and David," Graves links Tommy with the Biblical David facing the Philistine warrior Goliath. Unlike in the Bible, the giant defeats his opponent but David displays considerable courage and dies with honour. This Biblical retelling illustrates Graves's attempt at detaching himself from his pain. He is a silent mourner, standing beside Sassoon over the shrouded body of their friend, "with his white whimsical face twisted and grieving" (Sassoon 1983: 45). Tommy's death transformed Sassoon from the idealist Graves had first met a few months before into a single-minded avenger. Sassoon's poetic response to Tommy's death is also more personal. He summons Tommy's ghost in "Enemies," "At Daybreak" and in "The Last Meeting," where he calls him a "youth, that dying, touched my lips to song" (Sassoon 2002: 36), acknowledging that his death was an inspiration not only to kill but also to write.

In "A Letter Home," addressed to Graves, who was on leave in England, Sassoon draws on their grief after Tommy's death to highlight their strengthened bond, built on the affinity of minds and shared experience:

You and I have walked together
In the starving winter weather.
We've been glad because we knew
Time's too short and friends are few.
We've been sad because we missed
One whose yellow head was kissed
By the gods, who thought about him
Till they couldn't do without him.
Now he's here again; I've seen
Soldier David dressed in green [...]. (38)

In *Goodbye to All That*, Graves recalls his leave in the spring of 1916 with bitterness. He admits that he had been close to a nervous breakdown but coming home did not lift his spirits. He had to don his uniform and push his father to church in a bath-chair, allowing his parents to bask in the splendour of hosting their soldier-son. His visit home made it obvious that the civilians had no grasp of the experiences of the soldiers. Graves realised he could seek understanding only among his comrades. Unfortunately, as Sassoon points out in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, Graves (named David Cromlech in the book) was generally disliked by other officers, owing to his arrogance, absent-mindedness and untidiness. Sassoon, however, had generally "found him an ideal companion" (Sassoon 1986: 358); they offered each other stimulation for their intellect and motivated each other to transfer their experiences, so alien to the civilians, into poetry.

Having returned to France, Graves learnt about Sassoon's extraordinary exploits. He presents a second-hand account of Mad Jack's feats of valour: once he single-handedly captured a German trench under fire and proceeded to read poetry; on another occasion he risked his life to save a wounded lance-corporal, for which he was awarded a Military Cross.

In the midst of the Somme offensive, Graves and Sassoon looked forward to their post-war future. As poets, they found refuge in planning their visits to historical landmarks and writing poetry. Graves sent Sassoon a letter-poem, later published as "Letter to S.S. From Mametz Wood," in which he envisions the magnificent times awaiting them: "[...] doing wild, tremendous things / In free adventure, quest and fight, / And God! what poetry we'll write!" (Graves 1917: 32). Their exchange of letter-poems is reflective of their poetic instinct; channelling their emotions into poetry enabled them to find an understanding audience.

Graves's poem voices their mutual belief that poetry was their primary bond. They hoped the end of the hostilities would entail a greater artistic freedom; time would prove that it was the war that brought them closest together.

Introducing Graves's alter ego in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, Sassoon recounts their meeting during the Somme offensive that is missing from Graves's memoir. Sassoon establishes an atmosphere of suspense and apprehension; faced with the possibility of death, they escaped into daydreaming about the future. "[F]or me David[2] had often seemed to belong less to my war experience than to the freedom which would come after it" – reflects Sassoon (Sassoon 1986: 355). It is important that Sassoon stresses his hopes for a post-war future that Graves shared at the time. In 1922, eight years prior to the publication of *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, Graves asked him to forget about their wartime friendship and build it anew; "I only know about you by legend" – Graves wrote to him, rejecting their bond of the shared war experience (Seymour 1996: 111–112).

In July 1916, however, the two poets relished their brief meeting, in their imagination escaping from the carnage of the Somme into their fanciful dreams. Sassoon recalls the strangeness they felt while envisioning happier times, surrounded by sleeping soldiers, resembling corpses in the darkness. He admits that the reality threatened to break through their protective layer of daydream. They parted at midnight, unsure if they would ever see each other again. In the morning Sassoon hurried back to the spot of their nocturnal vigil but Graves was gone. What he found instead was a scrap of silver foil, which, in a surge of sentimentality, reminded him of the chocolate they had shared. Sassoon wonders if his mind was in touch with Graves's when he was fighting in the battle, concluding that his friend would dismiss such sentiments. Graves's account of their friendship is indeed more matter-of-fact and less poetic.

Sassoon's premonition proved nearly true: on 21 July he learnt that Graves had been killed. Heavily wounded, he was left for dead at a dressing-station, remaining unconscious for more than a day. His death was reported by a colonel who had been told that Graves was beyond hope. Believing his friend to be dead, Sassoon wrote in his diary:

[2] Not to be confused with David Thomas, who appears as Dick Tiltwood in *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*.

> And now I've heard that Robert died of wounds yesterday, in an attack on High Wood. And I've got to go on as if there were nothing wrong. So he and Tommy are together, and perhaps I'll join them soon. "Oh my songs never sung, And my plays to darkness blown!"[3] – his own poor words written last summer, and now so cruelly true. And only two days ago I was copying his last poem into my notebook, a poem full of his best qualities of sweetness and sincerity, full of heart-breaking gaiety and hope. So all our travels to "the great, greasy Caucasus"[4] are quelled. And someone called Peter[5] will be as sad as I am. Robert might have been a great poet; he could never have become a dull one. In him I thought I had found a life-long friend to work with. So I go my way alone again. (Sassoon 1983: 98)

This entry reveals Sassoon's struggle to contain his grief. As an officer, he was expected to remain calm and to serve as a role model to his men, but he was badly shaken. Before the war, Sassoon yearned for a poet friend who would share his passion. Graves filled the void in his life and in July 1916 he mourned the loss of their future, aware that he too might soon get killed. Sassoon's poetic response to the presumed death of his friend was the epitaph "To His Dead Body," which, ironically, Graves later helped to revise. In the poem, Sassoon addresses Graves, whom he believed to be beyond human comprehension, imagining an afterlife, where his friend could possibly be:

> Yet, though my dreams that throng the darkened stair
> Can bring me no report of how you fare,
> Safe quit of wars, I speed you on your way
> Up lonely, glimmering fields to find new day,
> Slow-rising, saintless, confident and kind –
> Dear, red-faced father God who lit your mind. (Sassoon 2002: 20)

Had Graves really been killed in the Battle of the Somme, now he would presumably share the reputation of Charles Hamilton Sorley, his contemporary whom he so much admired – he too would be considered a promising young poet, taken too soon by the folly of war, never allowed to realise his full potential. In *Siegfried's Journey, 1916–1920*, Sassoon writes about Wilfred Owen: "His face – what would it have become?" (Sassoon 1945: 63). Had Graves

[3] From "The Shadow of Death" (Graves 1916: 21).

[4] Graves refers to "the great hills of Caucasus" in "Letter to S.S. from Mametz Wood" (Graves 1917: 32).

[5] George "Peter" Johnstone (Dick in *Goodbye to All That*) – Graves's friend from Charterhouse School, with whom he was in love at the time.

died at the age of twenty-one, the same speculation could be voiced about him. By surviving his presumed death and living to the age of ninety, Graves embodied the common speculations about the future of those who died young.

The New Wordsworth and Coleridge

Both Graves and Sassoon were sent home to recuperate (Sassoon on account of trench fever). After believing his friend to be dead for two weeks, Sassoon was finally informed of his "resurrection." In his book, Sassoon fondly reminisces about his relief at hearing the news: "Silly old devil [...] he always manages to do things differently from other people" (Sassoon 1986: 372). In his own memoir, Graves recounts the leave they spent together, focusing on the gulf between the returned soldiers and the civilians. There was no escaping the war – it followed them wherever they went. They found themselves amidst the raging propaganda which hindered their communication with other people. Graves remarks: "The civilians talked a foreign language [...] I found serious conversation with my parents all but impossible" (Graves 2011: 237). They were disturbed by the attitude of the civilians who demanded their blood, ridiculed the calls for peace and compared their own involvement to that of the soldiers.

Their shared experiences in the face of such ignorance strengthened their friendship. As soldiers and poets, they could understand each other like no one else. They went to Graves's family cottage in Harlech, where they worked on their poems, offering each other advice. Graves recalls that they imagined peace differently: Sassoon associated it with nature and music, while Graves with children, of whom he was fond. In the next paragraph Graves describes his visit to the house of "a recently wounded First Battalion friend" in Kent (241). This friend remains conspicuously anonymous but he is, of course, Sassoon. Graves writes that his friend's brother was killed in the Dardanelles and his mother kept his room intact. Graves could not sleep at night, disturbed by his friend's mother conducting a séance, summoning the ghost of her dead son, which made him say: "I'm leaving this place. It's worse than France" (242).[6]

[6] It was in fact a real spiritual séance. Such an occurrence was by no means uncommon: World War I sparked a revival of the spiritualist movement, which had first become popular in Britain in the 19th century. Attracted by the claim of spiritualism that it was possible to contact the dead, people in mourning – most notably including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle – attempted to summon the spirits of their loved ones during such séances (Holloway 2006: 182–183).

In the following paragraph, Graves again mentions Sassoon by name. They went to the battalion base at Litherland, where they discussed their strategy and agreed not to protest against the war, believing that their duty was to be good officers to their men. Surprised by a lavish dinner organised at the base at the time of food shortages, they were determined to return to France instead of serving in the home-service, which Graves called "shameless madness" (ibid.).

It was during their leave that they made a plan to become the new Wordsworth and Coleridge by publishing a joint volume of poems. Eventually, the plan was cut short by Robbie Ross, who, as Graves's biographer puts it, "enjoyed the role of playing godfather to their talents" (Seymour 1996: 56). Graves regretted that their project fell through "because old Sassoon's such a dear and we took some pains over co-ordinating the two sets of poems" (ibid.). Ironically, they *would* follow Wordsworth and Coleridge's footsteps, after all, quarrelling like their Romantic predecessors.

Although they did not become actual collaborators, their friendship was translated into their poetry, emphasising its deeply literary character. "Two Fusiliers" by Graves is a tribute to their friendship, encompassing the aspects of their affinity:

> Show me the two so closely bound
> As we, by the red bond of blood,
> By friendship, blossoming from mud,
> By Death: we faced him, and we found
> Beauty in Death,
> In dead men, breath. (Graves 1917: 7)

Their friendship was possibly at its peak at that time – not only owing to their mutual understanding but also because of their frankness towards each other. They treated each other as equals, with neither reserve nor reverence, and their minor disagreements were yet to escalate.

At the time, the conduct of war weighed heavily on their minds. In *Goodbye to All That*, Graves points out that the War Office fuelled the hatred towards the enemy, turning the war of attrition into that of aggression. Such a sacrifice of youth angered both poets. Their bitterness is more visible in Sassoon's satirical war poems, but Graves shared his friend's frustration. In his memoir, he quotes a short satirical piece which he wrote at the time, where it is the middle-aged who have to go to war and the young hold administrative positions, boasting of their sacrifices.

At this point in his memoir, Graves shifts his focus to Sassoon, acting as the narrator of his story, in which he served as an intermediary. Even though they were of a like mind about the prolongation of the war, Graves claims that he "was both more consistent and less heroic than Siegfried" (Graves 2011: 287). Although Graves is frank about his mental condition in the book, he comes across as less impulsive and more pragmatic of the two. In *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, Sassoon admits that he was more idealistic and that he wanted the war to be an impressive experience, largely spiritual. In his diaries, he writes about his longing to die but also about his longing to live, which illustrates how conflicted he was. Graves was prepared to die but the prospect of a wasted life ahead of him filled him with regret. After his miraculous "resurrection," he was driven by a newly-formed determination to make the most of his talent (Seymour 1996: xiv).

Sassoon was sent to France but soon returned again, wounded in the throat, fighting until he collapsed. Graves reports that his friend was in a bad mental state at the time, being haunted by the thought of politicians and generals sending the youth to slaughter. So preoccupied was he with the fate of the soldiers for whom he felt responsible that his mind conjured up corpses lying on the pavements of London. Sassoon was now pondering on what steps to take to effectively protest and not be deemed a coward by his comrades.

In July 1917 Graves received a newspaper cutting with *A Soldier's Declaration*, in which Sassoon as the soldiers' self-proclaimed representative defied military authority, protesting against sacrificing the troops for political ends. Graves's reaction was immediate: although he admired his friend's courage and agreed with his arguments, he was worried about Sassoon's fate and angry at his pacifist friends who had influenced his actions. He was convinced that Sassoon was both mentally and physically unfit to bear the consequences of his protest, that is, presumably, to be court-martialled and imprisoned. Driven by concern for his friend, Graves decided to intervene and stop Sassoon from sacrificing himself. In spite of his own bad condition, Graves coerced the medical board into declaring him fit so that he could pull strings and organise a medical board for Sassoon. Graves managed to persuade Sassoon to appear before the doctors, whom he endeavoured to convince that Sassoon was suffering from a mental collapse, resulting from his courageous service in France. Graves's nerves were in no better state than his friend's and he burst into tears three times during his testimony. Sassoon was diagnosed with neurasthenia and sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital.

Graves's intervention had far-reaching consequences that he surely did not anticipate at the time. At Craiglockhart, Sassoon was a patient of W.H.R. Rivers, a renowned psychiatrist and anthropologist, who became a "father-confessor" to Sassoon and also influenced Graves's interest in the theory of conflict and his belief in the White Goddess, visible in his writing. Moreover, Graves was indirectly responsible for the meeting of Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. At the time, Owen was a twenty-four-year-old officer sent to Craiglockhart following a mental breakdown. He was a poet himself and held Sassoon in high esteem, greatly impressed with his first volume, *The Old Huntsman and Other Poems*. Sassoon influenced Owen's poetry, encouraging him to draw more on his war experience, translating it into poetry, most noticeably helping him revise "Anthem for Doomed Youth." Although they are now widely regarded as one of the most famous mentor-disciple pairs in British literature, Sassoon himself objected to simplifying their working relationship in such a way. Discussing Owen in *Siegfried's Journey, 1916–1920*, Sassoon stresses that Owen's potential as a war poet had already been visible in the poems written before they met. Moreover, he affirms that he too benefitted from their literary friendship: not only was Owen's companionship comforting at that difficult time but it also stimulated him when he worked on his next volume, *Counter-Attack and Other Poems*. However, Sassoon also admits that he "was a bit slow in recognising the exceptional quality of his poetic gift" (Sassoon 1945: 59).

As Graves's biographer argues, it was Graves who realised first that Owen had an extraordinary talent (Seymour 1996: 69). Having read some of Owen's poems, he offered Owen advice and encouragement. Greatly impressed with "Disabled," Graves wrote to Owen: "if you turned seriously to writing, you could attain Parnassus in no time while I'm still struggling on the knees of that stubborn peak" (70). Initially, Owen found Graves's admiration somewhat patronising but he quickly changed his mind. On 31 December 1917 he wrote to his mother: "I go out of this year a Poet [...] as which I did not enter it. I am held peer by the Georgians; I am a poet's poet" (Owen 1985: 306). Owen did not live to see his reputation as a war poet equal or even surpass that of his friends, as he was killed in combat on 4 November 1918, only one week before the armistice.

By the end of 1917 Graves and Sassoon began drifting apart from each other. In October Graves wrote to Edmund Gosse:

> He thinks he is best employed by writing poems which will make people find the war so hateful that they'll stop it at whatever cost. I don't. I think that I'll do more good by keeping up my brother soldiers' morale as far as I can. (Seymour 1996: 70–71)

It was only two years before that Graves criticised his friend's poetic idealism. Now that Sassoon had been channelling his war experience into poetry intended to shatter the widespread glorification of the war, Graves objected to his newly found tone. Although he had not been treated for neurasthenia, Graves was shell-shocked. In his memoir, he recalls how ordinary smells and sounds brought back traumatic memories to him; it became clear that he was unfit to return to France. Meanwhile, Sassoon, influenced by his sessions with Doctor Rivers, decided that the best course of action would be not to pursue his protest but to return to his men. In July 1917 he got shot in the head and narrowly escaped death, like Graves before him.

In January 1918 Graves married eighteen-year-old Nancy Nicholson, of whom Sassoon would grow jealous. By that time Graves had been sure he would not be returning to France and his marriage was a symbolic beginning of a new life, in which he hoped to become an accomplished poet and have children, without the threat of getting killed. It seemed unlikely that the future Graves and Sassoon envisioned for themselves in 1916 would come true, after all, with one of them married. In spite of Graves's attempts to reassure Sassoon about his involvement in their friendship, Sassoon was sceptical and did not attend Graves's wedding. In 1916 the news of Graves's death had made him despair over his lonely future; he brooded on his loneliness again after Graves's engagement, saying to his friend Lady Ottoline Morrell: "I wish I was in love" (Egremont 2013: 178).

Recuperating in a London hospital after his brush with death, Sassoon sent his "dear Roberto" a letter-poem, not intended for publication, revealing Sassoon's mental instability. Graves included it in *Goodbye to All That* as a marketing trick; it offered an insight into the mind of a famous poet who distinguished himself in combat. In the poem, Sassoon confronts the fact that the war has ended for him and he can no longer care for his men. The disjointed manner of his self-examination illustrates how disturbed and exhausted he was; "O Jesu make it cease," he entreats (Sassoon 1919[7]: 2). Graves's betrayal of Sassoon's trust went further than including this personal missive in his memoir to increase its sales – he also published five hundred copies of the poem without authorisation under the title *A Suppressed Poem* (Campbell 1994: 24). Apparently out of consideration for his friend's reputation, he edited his poem before publication: among other things, he substituted Sassoon's original signature

[7] The official date of the publication is inaccurate but I have decided to retain it.

"Dotty Captain" for his nickname "Sassons" and omitted the sexual innuendo "O Rivers please take me" (25). Nevertheless, even the purged version revealed more than Sassoon wished to disclose.

Goodbye to Friendship

"There are three inevitables: two Roberts[8] and a Siegfried rising side by side on the roll of fame and still young and more or less undamaged" – Graves wrote to Sassoon during the war (Moorcroft Wilson 2013: 270). However, the reality soon verified their plans of a shared future.

When *Goodbye to All That* was released, Graves and Sassoon had not talked for two years following their argument over Graves's treatment of Edmund Gosse, whom Graves had asked to review his book. Sassoon regarded this as a breach of good manners and reprimanded his friend (Seymour 1996: 155–156). In 1929 Graves was living with his wife Nancy, Laura Riding, who became his lover, and Geoffrey Phipps, who was to become Nancy's partner and with whom Laura was infatuated. When the situation under Graves's roof came to a head, Laura jumped out of the window, sustaining severe injuries. In order to raise money to pay for her convalescence and their move out of England, Graves quickly wrote and published his controversial memoir, whose second part largely concerns his friendship with Sassoon.

Sassoon learnt about *Goodbye to All That* from his close friend Edmund Blunden, who called it a "bombastic and profit-seeking display of your private affairs" (Egremont 2013: 346). The timing of this discovery was unfortunate, as Sassoon's relationship with the sickly Hon. Stephen Tennant was often exhausting to him. Sassoon was enraged by his friend's rendition of their story; he could hardly believe that Graves alluded to his mother conducting a séance (ibid.). Furthermore, Sassoon strongly objected to the publication of his private letter-poem, the mention of the accusation of cowardice towards Owen, and the portrayal of himself as the mentally unstable Mad Jack, saved by the narrator, purporting to have been more collected and lucid than he really was (ibid.). Such an affront called for revenge; not only did Sassoon and Blunden annotate the offending book with scathing remarks but Sassoon also went to Graves's publisher, demanding that he remove his letter-poem and the passage about his mother (346–347). That was practically the end of their

[8] Graves and Nichols.

friendship, even though Graves did try to renew it at the end of the 1930s (Seymour 1996: 275). They finally met in 1954, accompanied by Sassoon's son George and Graves's son William, and their meeting:

> […] made (in Sassoon's words) "all the years and misunderstandings" melt away, even if there was still "the same clumsy, opinionated half-schoolboy, half-schoolmaster, irritating at times but very likeable." (Egremont 2013: 478)

Unexpectedly, it was 1957 – the year when the revised version of *Goodbye to All That* was released – that witnessed Sassoon officially leave behind his anger at his friend's memoir. In another breach of his privacy, the press reported his conversion to Roman Catholicism, to which Graves reacted by sending Sassoon a letter (Roberts 2000: 318). Sassoon's response explains the spiritual benefits of his conversion and then addresses their bone of contention:

> I was not at all bothered by the re-issue of *Goodbye*, and hope it will remind the present generation of what 1914–18 was for those who endured it. I think the reason for my being so upset in 1929 was that I was in a great state of mental fatigue and worry with writing *The Infantry Officer*. All that you wrote about me was entirely generous – beyond my deserts. (318–319)

Conclusion

The publication of *Goodbye to All That* and the ensuing outrage give us an insight into the nature of the memoir as a genre. It was the personal and sensitive character of Graves's book that attracted a wide readership but at the cost of one of the most important friendships in his life. Had one or both of them really been killed, their friendship would have ended at its peak, immortalised in the public consciousness as one of the most tragic literary relationships, before the post-war reality took its toll on it. As it is, this turbulent friendship of two poets and autobiographers remains one of the most famous literary relationships of the first half of the 20th century. It was featured briefly in Stephen MacDonald's play *Not About Heroes: The Friendship of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen* (published in 1982), and more extensively in Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy (published between 1991 and 1995) and its screen adaptation (1997), as well as the recent docudrama *The Pity of War: The Loves and Lives of the War Poets* (2016).

On reflection, Graves called *Goodbye to All That* "a reckless autobiography in which the war figured, but written with small consideration for anyone's feelings" (Seymour 1996: 286). However, his dismissive attitude towards his memoir has had little influence on the readers, as it remains one of his most popular books.

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